

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TEL AV 06403 181018Z
ACTION SS-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 6403

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PARM, MASS, IS, US, PEBR
SUBJECT: LETTER FROM PRESIDENT CARTER TO PRIME MINISTER BEGIN CONCERN-

ING AIRCRAFT SALE

REF: (A) STATE 125076, (B) STATE 123877

1. MET WITH PRIME MINISTER BEGIN AT HIS RESIDENCE IN JERUSALEM AT 1700 HOURS MAY 17 AND DELIVERED THE PRESIDENT'S LETTER. HE READ IT CAREFULLY, WAS OBVIOUSLY PLEASED BY TEXT AND TONE, PROMISED TO REPLY IN NEAR FUTURE, AND ASKED ME TO EXPRESS TO THE PRESIDENT HIS GRATITUDE FOR THE "VERY WARM AND THOUGHTFUL LETTER HE HAD SENT."

2. BEGIN THEN SAID THAT HE FELT NONETHELESS IT WAS HIS DUTY, EVEN AFTER THE FACT, TO EXPLAIN AGAIN HIS CONCERNS ABOUT THE ARMS PACKAGE DECISION. HE SAID THAT THE CABINET WOULD BE DISCUSSING THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISIONS ON SUNDAY, MAY 21, AND WOULD "MAKE ITS DECISION THEN", SINCE HE EXPECTED THERE WOULD BE DIFFERENCES OF VIEW IN THE CABINET, AND HIS FOREIGN MINISTER HAD BEEN AWAY FOR SOME DAYS, HE COULD GIVE ME NO INDICATION AT THIS POINT AS TO WHAT THAT DECISION
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MIGHT BE. BUT HE SAID HE WANTED TO EXPLAIN AGAIN WHY ALL THE ISRAELI PUBLIC WAS SO WORRIED ABOUT THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION.

3. FIRST, HE SAID, THE US COMMITMENT TO SUPPLY F-16S TO ISRAEL WAS IN HIS READING "COMPLETELY UNCONDITIONAL"; YET THE ADMINISTRATION HAD PUT IT FORWARD

IN A WAY IN WHICH IT WAS CONDITIONED TO APPROVAL OF THE ARAB SALES PROPOSALS. SECOND, THE CONCERNS CENTERED ABOUT THE F-15 ITSELF-THE MOST SOPHISTICATED WEAPONS SYSTEM OF ITS KIND IN THE WORLD, AGAINST WHOSE EVENTUAL USE AGAINST ISRAEL AT SOME POINT IN THE FUTURE THERE COULD BE NO REAL GUARANTEE. AND THIRD, WITH REGARD TO THE EGYPTIAN SALE, THE DECISION WOULD CERTAINLY FURTHER HARDEN SADAT'S NEGOTIATING POSITION ON MIDDLE EAST PEACE BEYOND THE ALREADY VERY HARD UNYIELDING POSITION HE HAD ASSUMED. FOR ALL OF THESE REASONS, BEGIN SAID, HE COULD NOT CONCEAL FROM ME THE GREAT DEPTH OF WORRY AND SADNESS ENGENDERED THROUGHOUT ISRAEL BY THIS OUTCOME.

4. BEGIN'S WHOLE Demeanor THROUGHOUT THIS CONVERSATION WAS ONE OF GREAT FATIGUE AND DEPRESSION. HE WAS UNDOUBTEDLY SHOWING THE SIGNS OF THE SHARP ATTACKS FROM THE OPPOSITION YESTERDAY AND TODAY IN THE KNESSET AGAINST THE GOVERNMENT'S MISHANDLING OF THE ARMS SALE QUESTION. BEYOND THAT, THERE WAS SEEMINGLY A CONSIDERABLE RESIGNATION AND BAFFLEMENT AS TO WHAT THE FUTURE PORTENDED.

5. BEGIN ASKED ME AT THIS POINT IN THE CONVERSATION WHETHER I KNEW ANYTHING ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT IN THE ARMS AREA. WHEN I REFERRED TO THE PRESIDENT'S CONFIDENTIAL

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COMMITMENT TO THE SENATE TO PROVIDE ADDITIONAL F-15S FOR ISRAEL HE SEEMS FUNDAMENTALLY UNAWARE THAT ANY SUCH COMMITMENT HAD BEEN GIVEN, AT LEAST IN WRITING. I SAID THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD WRITTEN A LETTER CONTAINING THIS COMMITMENT TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE, AND THAT I PRESUMED THIS LETTER HAD BEEN MADE AVAILABLE TO THE ISRAELI EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON. HE SAID THAT THEY HAD NOT SEEN ANY SUCH LETTER, SO I PROMISED TO PROVIDE HIM WITH A TEXT BEFORE THE CABINET MEETING ON SUNDAY. (WILL PROVIDE TEXT FROM WIRELESS FILE OF MAY 11).

6. AS WE TALKED ABOUT THE CABINET'S IMPENDING DISCUSSION, I URGED THAT HE TRY TO PLACE THIS INCIDENT IN PROPER PERSPECTIVE AND TO PUT IT BEHIND US SO AS NOT TO DIVERT ENERGY OR ATTENTION FROM THE CENTRAL ISSUE OF RENEWING MOMENTUM IN THE PEACE PROCESS. FOLLOWING THE INSTRUCTIONS IN PARA 2 OF REF B, I STRESSED OUR CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO WORK CLOSELY WITH ISRAEL TOWARD OUR COMMON OBJECTIVE OF PEACE WITH SECURITY, AND UNDERSCORED THE ENDURING NATURE OF THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US

AND ISRAEL. BEGIN SAID AGAIN THAT IT WOULD BE VERY
DIFFICULT TO PUT ASIDE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE ARMS
DECISION SINCE THE WHOLE ISRAELI PEOPLE WAS EXTREMELY
WORKED UP ABOUT IT. I SUGGESTED THAT HIS OWN PUBLIC
REACTIONS WOULD HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO DO
WITH GUIDING PUBLIC OPINION TO HELP PUT THIS AFFAIR
INTO PROPER PERSPECTIVE, AND I URGED HIM TO DO WHAT
HE COULD TO SEE THAT THIS OCCURRED. HE DID NOT ARGUE MY POINT, BUT
CONCLUDED OUR CONVERSATION BY SAYING AGAIN, HOWEVER, THAT
MUCH DEPENDED ON HOW THE ISSUE WAS DEBATED IN THE
CABINET ON SUNDAY. I SENSED HIS EXPECTATION
THAT THERE WOULD BE CONSIDERABLE RECRIMINATION
AMONG VARIOUS CABINET MINISTERS WHICH WOULD MAKE
IT DIFFICULT TO CLOSE RANKS BEHIND ANY MODERATE PUBLIC
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POSITION.
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